

SHINE A LIGHT

Here it is - the very first Stones proper concert film since the IMAX, with a first proper première since the Hal Ashby one, really... So, how does "Shine A Light"-The Movie measure up?

Rolling Stones 'live' films, very much like the 'live' album have over the past decade-and-a-half become a bit of a non-event for me. Back in the day, Rock films per se were something else. "Gimme Shelter" was ground-breaking of course, documenting the Altamont tragedy, still holding its chilling own. Then there was the US release of "Ladies And Gentlemen" in all its quadraphonic glory registering the '72 tour whilst Robert Frank's suppressed cinematic product "Cocksucker Blues" caught that moment from a different angle. Apart from a few pay-per-views across the world, there was the grand 1982 première of Hal Ashby's Let's Spend The Night Together, setting the part-precedent for future Rock concert registration. Another one had been set a few years before, by Martin Scorsese with the Band's farewell flick The Last Waltz. The Stones in the meanwhile then returned to the theatres with their IMAX experience At The Max which was as unique as their comeback to the world's stage larger than life. After that (1990), the Stones' cinematic output fizzled out a bit. Lots of pay-per-views, videos for sale during the tour and straight-to-shop releases were as much as we got. Until now...

SCORCESE'S STONES CHALLENGE

News about Martin Scorsese filming the band came through some time last year. He had recently re-ignited his love of music film making with two excellent documentaries, one on the Blues and one on Dylan, focusing on the early electric days. So, what to do with the Stones? I have to be honest, I had my reservations. The band had tried to open up a bit over the years with some exclusive behind-the-scenes-shots and Mick had taken a crew along to help the audience understand what it's like "Being Mick" but to me it all came across rather contrived and staged. Don't blame 'em really. Who wants to be filmed with their pants down anyway? So what, indeed is left? Coming out of the theatre, I'll tell you what was left: filming that ferocious caged animal that is the Rolling Stones, celebrating what they stand for,

been through, what they're all about: one of the very few true legends in Rock. Eat yer hearts out kids, the band's back in town.. at a theatre near you!

TENSION AND BURN!

The anticipation and build-up to the event, the Stones live at New York's Beacon Theatre, is filmed in gritty black & white with frantic parties quarrelling over decisions made or rejected and a general lack of communication with the Woody Allen-style Scorsese wit in the mix: "We can't burn Mick Jagger." This section reminds me of how the tension is built leading up to Altamont in the Maysles brothers' Gimme Shelter film. Interestingly, Albert Maysles is on camera somewhere here too. Then there's the main part - show time! The set is definitely reminiscent of the Last Waltz's back drop, so there we are: the perfect marriage of two historic flicks so far already. Let's hope no-one gets killed... The third ingredient that completes the package comes courtesy of the late great Hal Ashby where the concert is interspersed with historic snippets of the band in younger action on and off stage, often with a couple of laughs thrown in. Without trying too hard, Shine A Light really captures and celebrates what the band is all about, all 45 years of it - a triumph!

IN ALL ITS GLORY

What I like most is that Scorsese and of course the band themselves have kept it all reassuringly traditional. No soaring cinematic acrobatics, ferocious editing or camera gadgets attached to guitar necks this time around. Just the band in all its glory presented at a perfect pace and hats off to Mick for choosing a well-pitched set list. And funny enough, one that I wasn't convinced of at first when I saw the CD and started to play disc one. But after actually seeing the film, I realise it's a really great package.

NO CHANCE - BLAME TOM CRUISE!

Shine A Light saw its world-wide première on 2nd April in London's Leicester Square and cinemas simultaneously across the world. Weeks before we at "Shattered!" had tried to lobby ourselves into the grand opening but to no avail as the final word came from Stones head quarters: "No chance. It's a 'Tom Cruise'-style red carpet affair and the band are very nervous about it!" Oh, well, after having returned my tuxedo, I was going to head for Surrey Quays on the night until Humphrey pointed out that the film also screened at the IMAX theatre. Now that was a pretty good idea so we got tickets for

three weeks later. Of course now I have no comparison of how the film looks in a regular cinema, but I gather the IMAX experience adds to the event. And what an event! Adding to its sincerity, the band have chosen a small venue, refraining from copious costume changes, extended walkways, elaborate light shows and pyrotechnics galore. Just the band, their guests and their audience. Even though the front row looks suspiciously like a troupe of hired fashion show extras... Shot in Scorsese's signature in 'n' out of focus, often hand-held camera work, giving the viewer a feel of intimacy and involvement the show kicks off with a soaring rendition of *Jumping Jack Flash* as the party kicks in.

KID IN A CANDY STORE

Shattered has Mick camping it up as he feels battered with a town in tatters, dahling... This camp 'put down' routine is adopted by Mick on various occasions during the show, such as *Some Girls* and *Just My Imagination*. It works at times but I'm not sure about others and I wasn't too keen on the intro yelps introducing *Sympathy For The Devil*. *She Was Hot* doesn't cascade as marvellously as it does on the album but Lisa and Bernard provide a great back-up vocal pattern to make up for that, keeping the song rolling on nicely. Then it's the rambling *All Down The Line* with the brass section kicking in and Woody on bottleneck - a great version. First guest Jack White is like a kid in a candy store proving how *Loving Cup* works remarkably well as a duet adding an extra dimension as if two different men are vying for the lady's attention. Could've worked well with Mick and Keith on the original... It's a great moment where from the beginning the duo looks almost like proud father (or at least older brother!) and impressionable son. Towards the end, you can tell all-smiles Jack is just dying to come off his mike, wanting to share one with the Mickster himself, which duly happens. *Champagne & Reefer* is a scorching Muddy Waters Blues introducing guest number two, Buddy Guy where the band find their roots once again and Mick kicks ass on harmonica. More ass, of the female variety, comes in the form of Christina Aguilera who duets on *Live With Me*. The latino popster has little rapport with Mick who's clearly up for a sexy routine, but you can tell she won't have it. Bring on Lisa any time, I'd say, who really gets into the groove on many an occasion.

TRULY TOUCHING

As Tears Go By is great in all its simplified glory and a treat with Keith plucking a twelve string masterfully. The Glimmer Twins' more brittle side highlighting unfeigned camaraderie continues to show in a heartfelt moment sharing the mike on *Faraway Eyes*. Truly touching stuff. This spills over into a moment like Keith delivering *You Got The Silver*, uniquely without bar stool and guitar in hand. Standing tall in a long black overcoat, cigarette in hand with black coated eyes piercing out of a time scarred skull providing windows to a soul so deep and so ancient this man truly is a living legend.

An amazing moment as Keith's once bewildered and menacing glare has softened to a timeless, knowing stare of a man who has reached a point of higher spirituality and contentment with what he has achieved. Somehow I get the feeling Keith is no longer looking for something... *Connection* is Keith song no. 2, shown in part alternating with some documental footage interrupting the flow of the song. Tucked away in the middle we find *Tumbling Dice* which as always catches me tapping my toes unawares. No matter how familiar that song seems, it always surprises me how catchy it is. Killer lyrics too! At the end it's time for the home stretch and over-familiar Stones territory: *Start Me Up*, *Brown Sugar* and the encore (*I Can't Get No Satisfaction*). No surprises there, just good rockin' and a nice Jagger joke of "can't stay, we gotta go to San Francisco". The show is drawing to a close.

TICK A BOX

And then it's 'good night', take a bow. No 'good byes' or 'farewells' ... just a strong statement that ticks a box in a 'what if?' scenario that the band could come to a close of some sort at this ripe old age at any time from now. But as Keith pointed out a few years back, "you can string us up and we will still not die." I think I know what he means after seeing this. - JH

SHINE A LIGHT: THE ALBUM

What, then, can we say about the album which, of course, is the soundtrack plus a few extra tracks tacked on from the first of the Beacon shows (the film shows the second night)? The issues with Stones live albums tend to be: (i) can they ever reproduce the excitement of actually seeing the band live, (ii) how well are they recorded, (iii) what songs they

contain (not another version of Jumping Jack Flash...) and, crucially, (iv) whether they are any better than bootlegs.

On most of those counts, live albums do not particularly stand the test of time. We all have our favourites, of course, but, with so many, you get diminishing returns. *Still Life* was downright weird, sounding like it was recorded in the bathroom; *Flashpoint*, by contrast, was so pristine that the audience might as well not have been there. *Live Licks* was better but will be forever ruined by the atrocious editing of *Rocks Off*. *Stripped*, a semi live album, comes out well and definitely repays constant listening.

So is it worth having *Shine A Light*? At the moment, I would say yes. On my criteria, (i) it definitely does recreate the excitement of that show at the Beacon. Clearly, everyone was having a good time, and Mick especially was on sparkling form. (ii) Bob Clearmountain has done an astounding job on the sound, with superb balance. (iii) the song selection is also terrific: four from the New York album, *Some Girls*, four from *Exile on Main Street* (which must be good), a smattering of rarities (*I'm Free*, *Connection*), and almost half of the songs not been previously released in live versions - plus the inevitable warhorses. Personally, I would have liked *Honky Tonk Women*, but maybe that will come on the DVD extras. Nothing at all from *A Bigger Bang* is also slightly surprising. And on (iv), on this past tour, we have not had such need of bootlegs, given that we already have *The Biggest Bang* four-set DVD.

WHEN I WANT TO GET HIGH

There are plenty of highlights. Unlike previous collaborations (Dave Matthews, Sheryl Crow are especially forgettable) Buddy Guy and Jack White make excellent duetting partners. Buddy Guy plays a blinder on *Champagne & Reefer* grinding out a razor-sharp guitar solo, and Jack White's voice is perfectly matched with Mick's on *Loving Cup*, but we will draw a discreet veil over Christine Aguilera, who seems to sing a completely different melody to the one required on *Live With Me*.

Quite a few of the songs benefit from a reinterpretation, particularly *As Tears Go By*, showing that great songs are genuinely timeless. The blistering version of *All Down the Line* sounds like a band of about a third of their age. Man, that sucker rocks!.

A real bonus is that Ronnie has recovered his flair. He absolutely *makes* *You Got the Silver*, taking over Keith's guitar part, and his pedal

steel solo on *Faraway Eyes* is almost as good as the original on the record. Keith and Ronnie lock in well on *She Was Hot*. Darryl is consistently brilliant, too, carrying the groove on *Tumbling Dice*. And, above all, Mick is the star of the show, drawing on his entire bag of tricks vocally, engaging the audience, cracking a few jokes and careering around the stage at the same time. The man is a walking miracle and, let's be honest about this, no one else can touch him.

But now we come to the real flaw. It pains me to say this, but Keith is a let-down. His singing voice is long gone, and we have got kind of used to that, and his rhythm playing is (patchily) on the button, but what is it with his solos these days? He pretty much wrecks *Sympathy for the Devil* and doesn't do much better on *She Was Hot*. *Connection* is a mess (which is why, presumably, in the movie, the song is not shown in its entirety). *Little T&A* is a shambles. Only when he sits down and focuses, as he does on the simple but effective solo on *As Tears Go By*, does he convey real emotion in his playing. Sure, he enjoys himself, and that is great, but not at the expense of the music.

So, 9/10, I would say. But, for all that, *Shine A Light* will never for me match up to *Get Yer Ya-yas Out*. It is as much a matter of memory as quality: I would listen for hours to *Ya-yas*, head clamped between speakers (no headphones in those days!) listening enthralled. Everything about it was good: the interplay between Keith and Mick Taylor, Mick Taylor's exquisite slide solo on *Love in Vain*, the rocking Chuck Berry covers, the cool which simply oozed out of the band and, above all, the eight and a half minutes of quintessential Stones that is *Midnight Rambler*. It was a more chaotic era, no doubt, but that was the Stones as a band. These days, it is the Stones as a phenomenon. - HK